



# JOE SANFELIPPO

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 15<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-0620  
FAX: (608) 282-3615  
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0015  
Rep.Sanfelippo@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Sept. 14, 2015

Contact: Rep. Sanfelippo  
608-266-0620  
[Rep.Sanfelippo@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Rep.Sanfelippo@legis.wi.gov)

## Partisan is not a four-letter word

MADISON, Wis. – There's no question we need to make some considerable and meaningful changes to the state Government Accountability Board – if not scrap it entirely and start over fresh.

But if we're really going to get serious about overhauling Wisconsin's regulator of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws, we have to put forward a reform bill that ensures the rogue GAB can no longer operate with a hidden political bias.

The GAB is statutorily required to be nonpartisan, but we have learned otherwise with the agency's involvement in the controversial John Doe probe launched in 2012 following the historic recall elections. To be quite honest, it's rather naïve to believe the six former judges and staff members who make up the GAB can be completely nonpartisan.

Just because they don't have Rs or Ds next to their names to identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats doesn't mean they don't have their own political views and, given the opportunity, won't look to push their own agendas.

I served on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors for four years and those positions are also intended to be nonpartisan. But I can tell you from personal experience that each and every member of that board held strong political beliefs. The "nonpartisan board" was nonpartisan in name only.

The reality of partisanship exists whether a person is elected to government, employed by government or volunteers for government. But being partisan in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing.

Being partisan only becomes a problem when individuals let their political beliefs cloud their judgment in a way that prevents them from doing their jobs in a professional manner. In fact, it could be argued the nonpartisan title actually promotes covert partisanship by providing cover for those who intentionally abuse their power to advance their own political ideologies.



# JOE SANFELIPPO

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 15<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-0620  
FAX: (608) 282-3615  
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0015  
Rep.Sanfelippo@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

And that's not just bad news for elected officials who unfairly become targets of the GAB. When someone's constitutional rights are violated, and when it happens way too often, it also leads to an erosion of public trust.

That's why we need to stop kidding ourselves and finally accept that it's impossible for the GAB to be entirely nonpartisan in its current form and make the agency completely partisan.

To encourage greater accountability and professionalism, Wisconsin would be wise to follow the model of the Federal Election Commission and have state legislative leadership appoint six election experts to the GAB, with three of the members identifying as Republicans and the other three as Democrats.

That way there will be no hidden agendas and more incentives for Republicans and Democrats to work together for the betterment of the public.

Because four votes would be needed to take any official action, it would be extremely difficult for one side to have a distinct advantage. Both parties may try to look out for themselves, but in following the FEC prototype, they would be compelled to negotiate to find an acceptable solution on all issues, preventing the scales from tipping too far in one direction.

And you can bet both sides will be watching each other like a hawk, which guarantees greater transparency and compliance for all residents and public officials in the state.

If it works for the Federal Election Commission, there's no reason it won't for Wisconsin as well. And in this political climate, a fair and open GAB is something all of us Wisconsinites deserve.

Rep. Joe Sanfelippo